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RUEHMS/AMEMBASSY MUSCAT IMMEDIATE 1196
RUEHRB/AMEMBASSY RABAT IMMEDIATE 7950
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH IMMEDIATE 3401
RUEHTRO/AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI IMMEDIATE 9781
RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS IMMEDIATE 3134
INFO IRAQ COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD IMMEDIATE 8580
RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE 7873

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 STATE 097443

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/18/2019

TAGS: [IZ](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#)

SUBJECT: SUPPORTING IRAQ IN THE LEAD-UP TO ELECTIONS

Classified By: NEA A/S Jeffrey Feltman for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[11](#). (U) This cable contains an action request - please see para 8.

SUMMARY

[12](#). (S) The period between now and Iraqi national elections in January 2010 will be acutely sensitive within Iraq, both politically and in terms of security. It is extremely important that we weigh in with regional states on their role during this critical time. Unfortunately, Iraq has seen an increase in bombings and other attacks that have increased tensions both inside Iraq and within the region. In addition, internal Iraqi politics is leading to some statements that will be viewed as unhelpful in the region. Iraq's neighbors and the Arab World can play a positive or negative role in the critical national elections. Action addressees should use the points in paragraph 8 to highlight Iraqi progress despite recent attacks and encourage host governments to support the Iraqis as they prepare for elections, but to avoid interfering. END SUMMARY

OBJECTIVES

[13](#). (C) While this is a case where it is particularly true that Posts are in the best position to gauge host government's involvement with Iraq, we ask Posts to use the points in paragraph 8 to make the most senior appropriate demarche to achieve the following objectives:

--Explain that, while high-profile attacks have taken place, the GOI continues to enjoy success in countering terrorism and there has been no resurgence of the wide-scale sectarian violence of past years.

--Given recent attacks designed to undermine order in Iraq, encourage governments to take positive steps to support the GOI to prevent sectarian violence and underline that the GOI is frustrated with outside support for terrorist actions in Iraq.

--Encourage governments to prevent meddling in Iraq's elections by financing or supporting particular groups, especially those that do not seek a stable, unified Iraq.

--Encourage governments to return their ambassadors after Ramadan to facilitate diplomatic communications and as a practical expression of support for a unified, sovereign Iraq.

BACKGROUND

¶4. (C) Beginning in late July, a series of explosions targeting political party offices, mosques, and civilian gathering places across the country began giving rise to the possibility of renewed sectarianism. The attacks of August 19, which resulted in by far the bloodiest day in Baghdad since the June 30 withdrawal of U.S. forces from urban areas, significantly escalated this tension.

¶5. (C) The effects of the violence have rippled throughout the region, with GOI officials claiming that Syria and perhaps Saudi Arabia were complicit in the attacks. As a result, both Iraq and Syria have withdrawn their ambassadors from the other's capital. In addition, diplomats from Bahrain, UAE, and Kuwait, all of which were operating out of

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the Al-Rashid Hotel, departed Baghdad shortly after the August 19 attacks. This was ostensibly due to the start of Ramadan, but the haste of their departure suggested otherwise. With Iraqi national elections approaching and some predicting more violence, it is all too easy to envision them not returning at all. When combined with the new challenges that the Iraqi MFA will be facing in light of the attacks -- no building to operate out of, loss of dozens of staff -- these developments could have a significant impact for some time.

¶6. (C) On September 1, Foreign Minister Zebari warned Embassy Baghdad that some Arab countries in the region now "strongly believe" that the improved political situation in Iraq is reversible, and that some will now put their weight behind efforts designed to strip Iraq of the political and security gains it has made in the last two years.

¶7. (C) As we work with the GOI and others in Iraq to counter sectarian violence and discourage retaliatory attacks, it will be critical for neighboring countries to play a positive role. Some countries, Turkey for example, are already playing a positive role, and the goal of this demarche is to encourage them to continue to do so. Others are playing a neutral, or in some cases negative, role. In either case, the Department requests addressees to encourage host governments to maintain ties with Iraq and to support Iraqi efforts to avoid sectarian violence in the lead-up to national elections and thereafter. We recommend drawing upon talking points in para 8.

¶8. (SBU) Begin suggested talking points:

-- An Iraq that is sovereign, stable, and self-reliant with a government that is just, representative, and accountable is in the best interest of the entire region.

--The U.S. remains committed to helping Iraq achieve that goal and to implementing our bilateral Security Agreement.

--On June 30, all U.S. troops were out of Iraqi cities, villages, and localities just as we said they would be. The Iraqis are taking ever increasing responsibility for their own security and the U.S. is moving to a supporting and advisory role.

--There are still those who would sabotage the path of progress in Iraq. The savage attacks against the Government

of Iraq on August 19, which resulted in hundreds of Iraqis being killed or wounded, are proof of this.

--We have consistently supported the Government of Iraq in emphasizing the role that foreign fighters and networks play in supporting terrorism in Iraq. The GOI is extremely frustrated with this situation and seeks to encourage international action against those outside of Iraq who support terrorism. We have been consistent in our support of Iraq against outside networks. These individuals will continue to seek to destabilize Iraq in the run up to the national elections.

--These individuals would have you believe that law and order has completely broken down in Iraq and the country is returning to the violent days of 2006 and 2007. That is simply not the case.

--Despite the high-profile attacks of August 19, overall incidents of violence are dramatically lower than those of the last five years.

--The communities that have been targeted recently have shown remarkable restraint and have refused to respond with violence. Instead, the vast majority of the Iraqi people are relying on the political process to settle their differences - broad participation in Provincial Elections earlier this year is proof of this, as is the success of Kurdish regional elections in July and the preparation for upcoming national elections.

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--During his recent visit to the U.S., PM Maliki acknowledged a legal and regulatory environment in Iraq that has served as an obstacle to investment, but he stressed that Iraq is taking measures to address these hurdles by putting forward new, investor friendly legislation, especially provisions that would allow foreign investors to own land in Iraq.

--On June 30, the Iraqi Ministry of Oil held the first bid round for oil and gas fields in Iraq's history, further proof that Iraq is opening in a new way to foreign investment. A second bid round is planned for late this year.

--Iraq is preparing for 2010 national elections, which, along with a peaceful transfer of power, are an essential component of any democracy. The period between now and then will be politically sensitive, as is the case in any democracy, and there will be challenges.

-- Of course, we will be closely watching the process, just as you will. We will not interfere in the process and we encourage you to refrain from doing so as well.

--These elections should be free and fair and without outside influence. The Iraqi people will decide who will govern them.

--Prime Minister Maliki is actively reaching out to the Sunni community inside Iraq. He continues to pursue a cross-sectarian coalition in the lead-up to national elections. We support the idea that cross-sectarian political alliances represent a healthy direction in which Iraqi politics should grow.

--While we strongly support Maliki as the current head of the Government of Iraq, we believe in free and fair elections to choose the next prime minister.

--(As appropriate) Thank you for strengthening your own ties with the Government of Iraq. Continued positive engagement from states in the region will be key to achieving the goal of a sovereign, stable, and self-reliant Iraq.

--(For those that have not sent an ambassador) We hope you will take this opportunity to show support for Iraq by sending an ambassador to Baghdad.

-- We hope you will continue your bilateral engagement with Iraq during this period. If your diplomats have come home for Ramadan, we hope they will return to Baghdad after Eid. Having your diplomats in Baghdad, especially during this period of transition, is essential for demonstrating your seriousness in helping Iraq fully reintegrate into the region.

-- (As Appropriate) We understand your concern that Iran seeks to exert disruptive influence in Iraq and in Iraqi politics. The best way to counter such influence is clearly to engage with the GOI and other players in Baghdad, instead of merely worrying from a distance.

REPORTING DEADLINE AND POINT OF CONTACT

¶9. (U) Embassies should report substantive responses from host governments by cable after the Eid holiday if at all possible. Please contact Josh Davis at (202) 647-8169 or via e-mail at davisjr@state.sgov.gov for any necessary further background information or argumentation to meet our objectives.

¶10. (U) Tripoli minimize considered.
CLINTON